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TWO

The Jewish Mother's Prayer: Mothers in Late Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Jewish Women's Prayer Books

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'A woman's prayer embraces an entire world . . .'
KISS, *Mirjam*, 1

RABBI ARNOLD KISS (1868–1940) wrote the eloquent words above in the foreword to the 100th edition of his prayer book *Mirjam*, published during the time of the emancipation of Jews in eastern Europe (1939). With this artful comment, he also reveals a larger agenda about women's prayers and the advice and knowledge they convey regarding motherhood. In this essay, I explore the world of Neolog Jewish women's prayer books, published between 1890 and 1935, focusing on prayers for mothers and the advice and knowledge they convey regarding motherhood. The rift between the Neolog and Orthodox communities was institutionalized following the 1868–9 Hungarian Jewish Congress. In time, they became two separate currents.[1]

Mirjam was one of the most popular prayer books published in this period; its first edition went to press in 1898, with many further editions and printings. The role of these newly envisioned prayer books became especially important with the changes brought about in the nineteenth century by the emancipation of Jews. Their contents sanctified the vocation of motherhood and the role of mothers in rearing children, thereby bestowing upon women the responsibility for the survival of Hungarian Jewry. Mothers came to be seen as powerful supporters of the national culture, and at the same time as guardians of the Jewish tradition, to which they were to hold on in the wake of sweeping cultural shifts occurring in eastern Europe and affecting virtually all aspects of Jewish family and communal life. Suddenly, mothers were described as having a key role, over and above their husbands, enabling them to impart the Jewish tradition to their children. This change took place in the context of the emergence of bourgeois nuclear families. It was they who were to 'shape the home into a blessed place of friendship and

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good deeds' (Neuda 1903: 169). Drawing on the forewords, meditations, and prayer texts written in Hungarian prayer books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I explore how the genre of prayer books portrayed mothers as a central cultural force holding the power to avert the sociopolitical processes and secularizing trends that affected Jews during this period.

Jewish Emancipation and the Idealized Role of the Mother

The history of central European Jews in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is also the history of their rapid collective rise in society and, concurrently, their swift modernization (Heinsohn and Schüler-Springorum 2006: 10). No other social group in the German linguistic and cultural territories underwent embourgeoisement on such a large scale and as successfully as the Jews, according to Simone Lässig (2004: 13). Her observations are also valid for Hungary. During the nineteenth century, laws were enacted in Hungary, similar to those in Germany, making it possible for Hungarian Jews to settle in urban areas, acquire property, and establish industrial plants (Toronyi 2010: 26). The process of emancipation changed the political and social status of the Jews from that of a marginalized people into citizens with a wide range of rights. They were granted the opportunity to become an integral part of the social and economic structure of the country (Frojimovics 2008: 41). They were able to participate in daily life under the same legal conditions as the non-Jewish majority, and to join in the establishment of a modern Hungary (Toronyi 2002:10). Additionally, when legal equality became complete in 1895 with the official acceptance of the Jewish faith (it was declared a received religion) by Hungary's government, it opened up cultural opportunities unknown to the Jews before this point (Toronyi 2010: 26). Access to new careers and new educational opportunities became a catalyst for their upward social mobility (Lässig 2004: 101–213, 659–60).

These changes had an especially strong impact on Judaism because this new environment created a space in which Jewish and bourgeois ideas could be integrated. We see this, for example, in the reforms introduced to synagogue services, including the delivery of sermons in Hungarian (Lässig 2004: 243–326, 660–2). At the same time, in the late nineteenth century, Jews had to face the challenges posed by modernity: the rationalization of tradition, the decline of religious authority and institutional legitimacy, and the individualization of religious practice (Glässer 2012: 67). Under the influence of these processes of secularization and emancipation, new Jewish communities emerged in Budapest and other major cities out of a desire for religious renewal. These communities turned towards the advancing European cultures and their patterns, attempting to tailor their daily lives and religion to these frameworks (Glässer 2012: 67).

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The secularization of assimilating Jews, their decision to turn away from religion or failure to practise it, became an urgent problem. Religious leaders were especially concerned about the role of mothers because they expected them to continue to play an important role in the religious education of their children and in the preservation of traditions, despite knowing full well that mothers were also exposed to this trend towards secularization and the upward mobility of their families. The Neologs in particular, who were a distinct faction of middle-class Hungarian Jews committed to integrating themselves into Hungarian society while embracing some level of reform within Judaism, had much to embrace, but also much to fear.

More pointedly, the assimilation of Jews in Hungary had a great effect on women. Wives and mothers assumed the bulk of the responsibility to adopt and adapt to the national culture, while at the same time maintaining traditional Judaism in their home life. There is no doubt that women took an active role in the formation of a Jewish middle class, since one of the loci for this phenomenon was the family itself. Women were entrusted with family life, while men seized the opportunities now open to them and entered the realm of business and politics, often abandoning Jewish practice in the process (Hyman 2006: 29). Chief Rabbi Leó Singer, who compiled an advice book composed of spiritual readings, *Kötelességtan* (1907), wrote poetically about his idealized view of the 'gender divide', reflecting the increasing pressure placed on rabbis to find solutions to the negative effects of emancipation and assimilation:

> Men think with their minds, women with their hearts; the power of the mind, therefore, is placed in the hands of men, while the power of love is placed in the hands of women. Men obtain the earthly fruit necessary for existence through hard work; the tame, weak hands of women plant flowers for solace. Men are called from the home: by their jobs and their occupations and their struggle for a material existence; women conjure the sweet home of the family into a shrine and wipe the sweat from the face of their husbands, create a home for those who struggle, and bring happiness to those who suffer. Like guardian angels, women safeguard the purity of family life and their home as well as maintaining and educating Jewish identity in the hearts of their children. It is from women that children should learn gentleness, compassion for those who suffer, and faith and trust in God. (Singer 1907: 20)

Once they entered the middle class, Jewish women had far more opportunities to establish contacts with non-Jewish women. Together they organized leisure-time activities, attended salons, and joined charitable organizations (Kratz-Ritter 1995: 25; Toronyi 2002: 15). Children were increasingly supervised by French or English governesses who successfully brought the model of western middle-class behaviour into the Jewish home at the cost of attachments to the Jewish tradition. With few available Jewish governesses, Jewish families often ended up hiring Catholic tutors to teach and care for their children. These tutors would perform their duties based on their own Catholic upbringing and religious

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principles. Miksa Szabolcsi (1817–1915), the editor-in-chief of the Budapest Neolog Jewish weekly *Egyenlőség* reported, regarding the wife of a Jewish banker, that if she 'should awake one day to find that somebody had baptized her child so that nothing could be done about it by then, she would feel very happy' (Szabolcsi 1898). Concerned about the presence of Catholic governesses serving in Jewish families, Arnold Kiss, a prominent Budapest rabbi, claimed that Jewish women did not bother with the religious life of their children. Jewish families had begun to acknowledge, even incorporate, Christian symbols into their home-life, such as Christmas trees, Easter eggs, pictures of Father Christmas, and so on (Kiss 1898). Ferenc Hevesi (1898–1952), chief rabbi of Budapest, in the foreword to his prayer book *Fohász*, pointed out that Jewish observance had become far less public and communal. He claimed this was especially true of mothers, for whom the home replaced the synagogue and whose prayers could become the free education of their children (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 4; Schőner 2008). But this was probably wishful thinking on Hevesi's part, as Kiss clearly warned of the dangers taking place even within the Jewish home:

> Something must be done about these things. The house is burning above our heads. The Jewish house. I go from house to house, looking for the Friday evening, for the charitable Jewish spirit, the simple lifestyle, the devotion between spouses, the power of love, support for the poor and miserable. I have difficulty finding the two candles. They are always readying themselves to go to a ball; there is no eve of the sabbath. (Kiss 1898)

Low birth rates (due perhaps in part to a consistent practice of birth control), a high divorce rate, a larger proportion of single women, and the development of industry and trade, not to mention improved access to education, enabled women to acquire a greater degree of independence and freedom and rise to positions of leadership (Konrád 2002: 15–16; Kratz-Ritter 1995: 25). But progress and traditionalism blended in the figure of the mother in particular, as she experienced the pull of the outside world and at the same time faced the challenge of maintaining some level of Jewish tradition in her home (Kaplan 1997: 295–303). Indeed, her position in the family unit made her the trustee of a form of ethnic belonging. In the course of the social and economic transformations of the nineteenth century, and in line with the general socio-historical trends of the age, motherhood became a key to conceptualizing the ideal Jewish woman and, at the same time, epitomized the cultural tensions experienced by the Neologs, who sought to embrace the benefits of emancipation and secularization (Kaplan 1997: 37; Prestel 2006: 106). Jewish thinkers of the time were grappling with how and in what form Judaism would survive.

A series of articles published in 1898 in *Egyenlőség* focused on the role of mothers, equating a passive attitude towards Judaism on their part with serious consequences for the future of Jewish children (Kiss 1898). Leó Singer attributed the principal cause of the indifference and estrangement witnessed within the

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community towards Hungarian religious institutions to the fact that 'a substantial part of our co-religionists and in particular Jewish women and mothers are not familiar with and do not know all that our religion demands' (Singer 1907: 4–5). A few issues later Arnold Kiss pointed out:

> The lack of the warm, honest, noble spirit does indeed hurt me deeply and wound my soul, one which used to be present in the homes of our women at the time of the *tkhines* [women's prayers] . . . according to the Jewish saying, the wife is the house, the everything, and the most valuable item in a husband's fortune. This means that as the wife is, so too is the entire house. The husband lends the house and the family external decoration and authority with his job, character, and the power of his social position and fortune, and the woman, however, brings back a great deal more in return to the family home. (Kiss 1898)

Facing this urgent situation, rabbis such as Kiss argued that the answer lay with mothers. He called on Jewish mothers to pray every evening with their children before putting them to bed (Kiss 1898). Similarly, Fanny Schmiedl Neuda (1819–94), whose husband was a rabbi and a member of the reform movement in Nikolsburg (Mikulov), warned of the consequences that the Jewish community would face if it failed to rise to the challenge of modernity. Her description of the dire situation in which Hungarian Jewry found itself, in her prayer book *Stunden der Andacht*, nonetheless carried a glimmer of hope. She noted that only mothers, gifted with 'the nobility of feeling and deep religiosity' that are unique to women, could harness an internal, spiritual power significant enough to ensure the birth of another generation of Jewish children (Neuda 1903: 172). In her mind, mothers possessed something instinctual that only they could draw upon to maintain a connection to the Jewish tradition. Her eight-page essay at the end of her prayer book offers guidance to Jewish mothers on how to set an example for their daughters. In it, Neuda opposes the practice found in wealthier Jewish houses in which all of the girls' energy was 'dissipated on piano playing, opera singing, and learning languages' (Neuda 1903: 169). Indeed, as she implores mothers, 'We must give [our girls] books, carefully selected books that have been read with the strict eye of a responsible mother or governess' (Neuda 1903: 173). Mothers were to resist the influence of Hungarian culture and prepare their daughters for a sacred twofold vocation—that of wife and mother. The goal was to mould daughters into the priestesses tending the altar of their home (Kratz-Ritter 1993: 295). Neuda writes in the Afterword to her prayer book:

> What a significant influence [a woman] has in her capacity as mother! Indeed, the performance of the woman as mother and the educator of her children is of inestimable importance. The influence of the four pillars of her homeliness spreads through entire generations and for generations to come. . . . Her singing, her words, her admonitions and example penetrate every pore of the young soul and create a wellspring of good, virtue, and religion that will make her children happy throughout their lives and will continue to radiate, to bring blessings to later generations. (Neuda 1903: 169)

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And so, with great idealism, Jews of the time pinned their hopes on Jewish mothers, despite the fact that these mothers also contributed to the abandonment of Jewish practice and tradition. Indeed, the trend of escaping into family life was a defensive technique that was not unique to the Jewish community. As Richard Sennett points out in his work on the formalization of public life in Europe in the nineteenth century, the family increasingly came to represent an ideal moral value system, superior to public life (Sennett 1998: 30). Many saw in the family the elements that would reverse the effects of cultural change occurring in the public sphere, and in that respect Jews were no different to the rest of society.

The prayer books published during this period by male Neolog leaders in Hungary call attention to the need for women of all ages to take responsibility for imparting a sense of deep religious devotion to their families. It is worth reflecting on the fact that those who drew the attention of the Jewish public to this matter were not Jewish mothers and women in general, but (with the exception of Fanny Neuda) men in leading public and communal positions. Male leaders devised remedies for the collapse of Jewish religious affiliation in the form of prayer books for women, imagining that the preservation of Jewish tradition lay primarily with mothers. The Neologs built on the tradition of the *tkhines* prayers —Yiddish devotional compositions for women—in order to address the spiritual breakdown that had erupted in their communities.

In taking on this task, the Neologs imposed their own desire to promote a type of moderate reform within Judaism. The authors of the Neolog prayer books hoped that by presenting ideas in the Hungarian language and in an emotional manner they could lead mothers back to the religion of their forefathers and encourage the regular practice of prayer. They anticipated that their newly composed *tkhines* in Hungarian would strengthen the identity of Jewish women who could not read Hebrew or Yiddish, reconnecting them with their children, and ultimately, their children with Judaism. They saw in this process a guarantee for the religious upbringing of future generations (Kratz-Ritter 1995: 34–5, 47–9). As a result, these new prayer books constructed an ideal image of the Neolog Jew—culturally emancipated, but religiously engaged as well.

Luring Women to the Modern Prayer Books

Recognizing the shortage of published works available to women, Neologs who were leaders of individual Jewish congregations throughout Hungary sought to fill this void in a way that would help them achieve their own goals.[2] In the pages of *Egyenlőség*, in 1898, the renowned journalist Samu Haber wrote:

> The religious education of the female generation that began attending school after emancipation was legislated is all wrong; women know precious little of the prayer-book of their ancestors. Not only do they not understand it, but they also do not feel the old spirit. (Haber 1898)

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Dávid Kaufmann, a professor at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, writing in 1893, made a similar argument:

In order to raise the standard and cultivate religious knowledge, particularly among our girls and women, it is vitally important to create a Jewish 'popular literature'. In the past we had such a literature, but we have lost those works. There is an urgent need to compile new works that will have a beneficial influence and take the place of the old writings. (Kratz-Ritter 1995: 34)

New prayer books were specifically designed to compensate for the shortage of devotional literature for women. They were to lead women back to the forgotten traditions of the *tkhines*, but in a new form. Ferenc Hevesi reiterated these views and pointed to solutions that lay in his prayer book, *Fohász*, claiming that, 'Every person must remain faithful to the religion in which his or her mother taught him or her to pray.' It is clear that, for Hevesi, religion, prayer, and motherhood were intimately linked. He believed that one could, in fact, develop a sense of religious commitment, and even learn about Judaism, through prayer. In his mind, producing a good prayer book would 'put into lively motion the dogmatic and moral content of religion' through the mother, bringing to the fore emotions that were essential to developing deep piety (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 5–6).

In this period, women were becoming active readers and this further spurred the efforts of the Neologs to publish new prayer books. It is well known that in the course of the nineteenth century European women joined in new educational endeavours. Secular as well as religious publishers realized that they needed to take their demands, tastes, and interests into account (Nagydiósi 1957: 193). Women readers, including Jewish women, had a greater appreciation for secular literature than their predecessors, and as a result, regardless of religious allegiance, women's magazines and inexpensive novels became enormously popular (Lyons 2000: 354). These all contained descriptions of the novelties of modern bourgeois urban life: the worlds of fashion, cinema, theatre, and the salon. Such developments strengthened the desire of religious leaders to provide women with spiritual reading matter and prayer books that addressed their new freedoms but at the same time conformed to Jewish religious traditions.

Prayer books that were marketed from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century were designed to appeal specifically to mothers' needs. Besides translations of synagogue prayers (for example, the Shemoneh Esreh), prayers for the cemetery, and prayers mentioning the three *mitsvot* incumbent upon women (separating the challah dough, lighting the lamps before the sabbath, and family purity laws), they also contained prayers that suited the lives of modern, middle-class Jewish women and that had moral import. These prayer books were organized thematically as follows: common prayers, prayers for the sabbath and for the festivals of Passover and Sukkot, prayers for memorial days

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and for mourning, and various prayers tailored to women's needs. In this final section the authors attempted to provide texts for prayers connected to the tiniest events and difficulties in the life of a mother. There were prayers to become pregnant, prayers recited when expecting a child, prayers for the birth of a daughter or son, for the blessing of a child, for a young mother's first visit to synagogue, for the happiness of a child, for infant children, for sick children, for the children of a sick adult, for children who needed to be fed, for the circumcision of a son (*berit milah*), for a son's barmitzvah, for the naming of a daughter, for a daughter's bat mitzvah, for the wedding of a son or daughter, for the happy marriage of one's children, for a child who is far away, for a disobedient child, for a good child, for a son who is a soldier, for widowhood, and for stepmothers.

Departing from the tradition of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when prayers for women (*tkhines*) were written in Yiddish and were published regularly, these prayers were written in Hungarian. Even the daily traditional prayers, such as the Shema, were translated. Both the *tkhines* and the newer prayers focused on enriching women's devotional practice, touching their deepest spiritual selves by addressing their every concern (Kay 2004: 74; Weissler 1998: 187). *Tkhines*, in contrast to daily prayers for men, were said mainly at home; readings were voluntary and flexible and could be recited when a woman wished to do so. They were almost always phrased in the singular and often had space for the petitioner to insert her own name, thus making them a very personal address to God (Weissler 1998: 8). It seemed that for Hungarian Neolog Jews *tkhines* were an antiquated form of the type of prayers women now needed in order to enhance their spirituality. Writing new prayers for women would also eliminate some of the superstitious elements evident in *tkhines* that no longer made sense from a moral, theological, or stylistic point of view (Kritz-Ritter 1995: 31–4).

With the occurrence of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), the *tkhines* gradually lost their role in the Jewish liturgical tradition. This was due in large part to the fact that they were written in Yiddish (Kay 2004: 113–15). Jewish reformers (around the time of emancipation) regarded Yiddish as an obstacle to *Bildung* (cultural assimilation) and a sign of social and cultural separatism (Konrád 2005: 1338). They believed that the use of Yiddish imprisoned Jews in a culturally inferior state and prevented them from sharing in a secular culture that included everything from theatre, literature, and salons to education. By using Hungarian in their prayers, they were expressing the conformity of Neology to the majority nation (Konrád 2005: 1338), as Kiss pointed out on the first pages of his prayer book, *Mirjam*:

> Strong patriotic sentiment was manifested in the souls of our women when they took our sweet mother tongue on the enchanting wings of prayer, into our temples. For us praying in Hungarian expresses a sacred sentiment in a sacred language. (Kiss 1939: 6)

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The desire to achieve linguistic assimilation, while apparent even within the life of the synagogue (as rabbis delivered sermons in Hungarian), made the publication of prayer books in German and Hungarian very appealing to Neolog women.

In *Mirjam*, Kiss made his sentiments clear. Prayer in Hungarian presented women with 'a sacred relic'. The translation of prayers into Hungarian was a way of replacing one sacred language with another so that Jewish girls and mothers could tap into the old spirit of Judaism and be able to feel and understand it (Kiss 1939: 12–13). Kiss promoted his prayer book among women by laying bare, in the foreword to *Mirjam*, his belief that the Hungarian language could 'soothe the hearts of women' in a way that no other language was able to do.

More specifically, by leafing through any of the Neolog prayer books, one can see that their form and content reflect the reform efforts of nineteenth-century Neolog intellectuals aimed at the religious practice of women. On the one hand, the text reveals the objective of the prayer book authors to motivate women and to prompt them to take a more active part in formal religious practices. The inclusion in these prayer books of synagogue prayers, in keeping with the liturgical tradition, not to mention community prayers specifically written for women to say during religious festivals, served this aim. More significant were prayers written in the first person, which served as individual devotional compositions for the home, following the traditional practice of reciting *tkhines*. The authors hoped these prayers would lead women back to the Jewish tradition and make them aware of their responsibility for transmitting it to their family (Kratz-Ritter 1995: 106–11). In a way, the exclusion of women from synagogue services and ritual practices contributed to fulfilling this hope, as mothers saw the home as the centre of their religious lives (Kaplan 1997: 73). The prestige associated with the duties and responsibilities of motherhood, not to mention those of wife and homemaker, was high at the start of the twentieth century, not only among Jews, but also in the European Catholic, Protestant, and secular cultures of the day.

Indeed, this type of domesticity complemented the responsibilities taken on by fathers, who worked outside the home (Schütze 1988: 124). The Neolog prayer books reflected and encouraged this marked separation between the private lives of women and the public lives of men (Sennett 1998: 30). The Hungarian Jewish community exalted mothers. Neologs spoke of them as 'guardian angel[s] of the family nest', as 'the priestess[es] of the home and hearth', and as embodying unassailable matrimonial virtues, carving out a stable and honourable place for them. It was as if the Temple in Jerusalem were metaphorically transferred to the home, and responsibility for its holiness placed not in the hands of male priests or rabbis, but in the hands of women. Mothers became the educational leaders, thereby seizing a mission once bestowed on rabbis and fathers. In *Stunden der Andacht*, Neuda lauds women who carefully nurtured and taught their children, ensuring that their daughters would become 'priestesses' of stable 'domestic

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altars' (Neuda 1903: 169). Similarly, the prayer book *Al kanfei hanefesh* (Krausz 1934) regards mothers as the central force in an overarching religious project:

> To a real woman, home and family are what the flower garden is for the flower. The only worthy place and circle of her existence, her essence, and her success. . . . Blessed is the family that demonstrates the care of the mother. . . . Happy is the child whose clothing and care bear the external signs of motherly love just as his soul is marked by a caring, ennobling, and character-building upbringing. . . . Such a wife and such a mother may deserve on the part of her husband the most devoted and most faithful love . . . and on the part of her children, deep respect, coupled with admiring love. And if society is nothing but the unity of such families and individuals, the social position of the Jewish woman also improves: it is more than equality with the man. It is already being placed on a pedestal, the basis of which is not romance, but gentleness being fed by the deep appreciation of the spiritual virtues of the woman . . . a pedestal onto which a woman is raised by her own personality. (1934: 170)

Despite this, while much seemed to be changing, nothing changed fundamentally. No matter how much Jews assimilated, no matter how much Neologs wished to convey their own religious agenda in these prayer books, a woman was best able to fulfil herself within her family, among her relatives, in her religion, and, in a broader sense, within society, when she was blessed with a child. In her book on Jewish women, Nahida Remy placed particular emphasis on the value of motherhood:

> We know the heavy weight that the Jewish way of thinking places on women's motherhood. The greatest ambition among Jewish women is to become a mother, and the Bible shows numerous examples of the childless mother going to the edge of prohibition—but only that far—to reach her desired goal, which for her represents an indispensable dignity . . . the way motherhood was the greatest joy and honour for a Jewish woman, so too childlessness was her most bitter pain. (Remy 1894: 134)

Many saw barrenness as a punishment from God, and so the biblical example of the life of Hannah was placed before women longing for the blessing of a child in the text of the prayers, in order to give expression to their suffering:

> My God! I call to you from the sorrowful night of the tortures of my soul: Oh, bless my life with the blessing of a child. You ordained woman to the sacred calling of motherhood so that she could carry under her heart and nourish with her blood the future and be the servant of life, rejuvenating life through sufferings. If I see a child, the longing to be a mother seizes me and I would like to nurture it, caress it, and rock it in my arms. When I am among happy children playing, pains grip me: why do I not have a child whom I could nurture with love and guard with motherly care! . . . Now my life seems empty, empty and bleak. My joy is not complete. There is no unfading beauty in my life. You have blessed me, my Lord, with a good spouse, who does everything to cheer me, but I have no consolation, I have no hope, because I do not know if there is a purpose to my earthly existence. . . . Like the heart of Hannah in the Bible, my heart pines in sorrow.

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And as Hannah implored You, I pray to You as well: You who have listened to her, listen to me as well. (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 467–71)

Pregnancy and childbirth remained the most important aspects of motherhood. For this reason, the early modern *tkhines* collections included prayers for precisely these situations, where giving birth was understood to be painful and dangerous. The new prayer books published in Hungary at the turn of the century continued this tradition, with poetic expressions and sincere, intimate tones, as in this prayer, asking for a safe delivery:

In this hour, I pray before You for two lives: one is my own life, the other is that of a still unknown being that I am nourishing with my heart's blood and whose arrival is my greatest happiness, and will be my greatest pride. You are initiating me, Lord, with pain for the most sacred vocation—You will arm my weak self with strength . . . You are beneficent above all! I believe in You, who ripens the fruit on the trees in the garden and keeps the trunks strong and healthy as the fruit are ripening, and I feel that You will keep me too in strength and health as I cradle my child in my arms and bless Your sacred name again. (Kiss 1939: 376)

This passage from *Mirjam* clearly shows the anxiety expectant mothers felt at the prospect of impending childbirth. This is understandable considering that before the early twentieth century in Europe giving birth was dangerous for both mother and child—the spectre of death was never far away. Childbirth was associated with magic, sacred elements, and rites shaped by beliefs and superstitions (Deáky-Krász 2005: 97; Lőw 1903: 181). Prayer was always the most important of these protective rituals:

God talks to me amid the pain. And I pray. Be with me, Almighty and Merciful God. Give me strength in this trying hour. I trust in Your grace and I am filled with the hope of Your clemency, with which You have mercy on Your creation. (Hevesi 1918: 85–6)

Another significant event in the life of the mother was her first visit to synagogue after giving birth. This took place during the third or fourth week after her delivery. Prayer books included texts for this occasion, again paralleling the tradition of the *tkhines*. These texts were not only reminders to the mother of her religious life and obligations, but also served to bring her back physically to a setting of faith and community, despite the pressures of caring for a newborn. At the synagogue visit, the mother primarily expressed gratitude for the birth and good health of her baby and prayed for strength to fulfil her motherly role responsibly in the future (Pillitz 1890: 120). Similarly, *Fohász* offers the following prayer enabling mothers to ask for wisdom and insight in order to raise a child properly, in holiness:

My God! I do not wish to bring up my child, spoiling him and pampering him wrongly and mistakenly. I want to bring him up to be a valuable man. I want to weed the mistakes out of his soul, I want to sift the sinful passions from his heart, I want to tear evil

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inclinations from his temperament. Gentle love and benign rigour will be my guides in this endeavour . . . I vow before Your Majesty to bring up my child religiously, in the religion of my ancestry, faithful to Your sacred will, in the spirit of the Torah, in the truth of Your teachings. Amen. (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 485–6)

In these texts, we recognize an outline of the basic principles of Jewish childrearing. They reflect not merely the desire, if not the exhortation, to meet religious expectations, but also the concerns of the mother for her child as she worries about whether she can fulfil her own maternal role. That the authors of prayer books placed these anxieties in the mouths of mothers suggests that they endowed women with moral authority over their children's upbringing, thus absolving themselves of the gravity of this responsibility. Somehow, if children failed to embrace their Jewish identity, the fault would lie with their mothers and not with their fathers. This accentuated the weight of the religious duty conferred upon mothers. Accordingly, idealized descriptions and bold criticisms of mothers appeared in Singer's *Kötelességtan* (Singer 1907: 89)—and in the popular women's book by Nahida Remy:

A caring mother is like a mother bird that does not fly from the tree where her nest and family are. She nurses her babies, she does not entrust them to strangers, but she herself takes care of, nurtures, rears, and teaches her children to lead them on the path of well-being and success. (Singer 1907: 89)

Recently, they have been engaging in a bad habit, namely, that they very often entrust their children to the care of paid people. Places to stroll are often full of their children, but where are they? Instead of them (with the exception of very poor families), unscrupulous, indifferent servants, who are cheeky to the point of stupidity, deal with them for hours without knowing or considering what benefits children and what does not. You, Jewish mother, if you want to deserve this name (which has been your pride so far), you yourself should deal with and play with your children. Your husband will have no objections. (Remy 1894: 140)

This may explain why Immánuel Lőw (1854–1944), the chief rabbi of Szeged, fittingly described a mother's task as 'sacred work' in his prayer book, encouraging her to take full care of her children. He enabled mothers to pray not only for a reward from God for weathering the difficulties of mothering, but also to earn their husbands' love because of their success (Lőw 1903: 185–6; Újvári 1929: 548).

Ultimately, prayer book authors believed that it was mothers who could build stable and peaceful Jewish homes. They expressed their hopes for harmony between husbands and wives, parents and children, and between siblings (Kaplan 1997: 74; Schütze 1988: 125). Neolog prayer books therefore portray mother–child symbiosis with great emotional richness, and feelings of love, compassion, and nostalgic longing, viewing this relationship as the cornerstone of family cohesiveness. Anxiety for the child's physical and mental development,

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even loving concern for the mother–child bond, is reflected in many of the prayer texts, once again idealizing the place of the mother in the lives of her children:

> Lord, I cannot say how much I love my child. Are there words that could express this love, is there a word for the depth of my feelings? No poet can sing of it, no master of words can record the delightful love of my soul and its unbreakable attraction to the one You have given me to enrich my life so, to my dear, tiny child. Lord! I would dearly like my feelings to be returned in the heart of my child! I am afraid that the time will come when I lose his attachment. (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 482–3)

This hope and longing are present throughout the prayer texts:

> May warm parental love burn unquenchably in me, and do not allow me to be distracted from my children by vain longings, the search for fleeting delights. Teach me to educate and protect these innocent young offspring, to feel and hold myself to be their educator, in words, deeds, and example. (Lőw 1903: 188)

Unsurprisingly, Jewish husbands did not have any objections to women taking over the responsibility of childrearing (Neuda 1903: 169). Fanny Neuda noted that fathers did not have a great deal of power over the hearts of their children, as work often kept them away from home. They were frequently engaged with financial matters and professional connections. She embraced the stereotype that men lacked the ability to be as gentle, refined, and soft as women and, therefore, were not as emotionally open to their children as were mothers.

In education, just as in adult life, the mother's expectations of her daughters and sons differed. In prayers recited when sons reached adulthood (barmitzvah), fell sick, or started out in life, mothers prayed for the love of work, an excellent mind, ambition, and a happy career. More specifically, the relationship between mother and son brought to the fore the stereotypical image of the ideal mother as self-sacrificing, willing to suffer any obstacle that daily life threw her way for his sake. For example, in *Kötelességtan*, Singer writes:

> The Jewish mother for her part gives up everything, only to pass something on to her children; even if she does not show it: she would rather starve than allow anything to be lacking either in the material or spiritual well-being of her children. She is tireless in figuring out and planning what would aid her son in acquiring knowledge and a position; if she is a widow, she becomes victorious over all shyness that tends to be the characteristic feature of all single moral women and will hurry to find a patron and a teacher for her son and will endure for him a great deal of sacrifice and humiliation. (Singer 1907: 87)

In marked contrast, mothers prayed for their daughters to be modest and pious, emulating the most famous biblical mothers, Sarah, Rachel, and Leah, and thereby invoking yet another female stereotype. In a meditative prayer written for the birth of a daughter that appears in *Fohász*, the ideal mother–daughter rela-

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tionship produces daughters who become entirely like their mothers, protecting and shaping the life of the home:

> A baby girl will always remain the child of the mother. She is attracted to the magic of the home, and her heart and soul will always be attached to her home. She does not long to be part of the outside world; the struggles of life do not turn her heart away from the home. (Hevesi and Hevesi 1930: 464)

As men neglected religious traditions, Neologs hoped that the family would fill the vacuum. The home would become the major locus of expression of Jewish observance and devotion so that Judaism would not be lost. Women became the curators and caretakers of this 'living' religiosity in the home. They wove cloth out of the yarn of the everyday, raising their children in the image of the faithful and the devout. In so doing, mothers had the critical power, or so the Neologs hoped, to shape the cultural and social milieu within which traditional religious feeling could flourish and grow (Kaplan 1997: 94–5; Kratz-Ritter 1995: 38). As long as the mother fulfilled a particular role, the Jewish tradition could survive the changes of the age. In the prayer book *Ráhel* (1902), Gábor Weisz predicts that:

> If the woman goes to synagogue, if she transplants the atmosphere and teachings she has experienced to her own house, if she applies them according to her talents and brings her children up in this spirit, then she provides the same service for her congregation as the man who actively participates in each matter of the congregation. The child who is brought up in such an atmosphere created by the mother will come to love religion, honour the rituals, and remain filled with eternal gratitude toward the parent who made his soul nobler and saved him from the desert of unbelief. The standards of religion can easily be reconciled with all the symptoms of culture and progress because religion is hidden inside the soul, but its blessing influences all our actions. (Weisz 1902: 15)

Conclusion

In this essay, I have examined women's prayer books in the urban, middle-class Neolog Jewish communities of Hungary. I have drawn out from these texts a depiction of the role of the Jewish mother at a time of important cultural shifts. The Neolog rabbis and intellectuals responded to these cultural changes via the creation of prayer books for women, containing prayers and meditation texts directed towards the figure of the mother. A close look at these prayer books allows us to form a picture of how their authors tried to shape their readers' conception of motherhood. They offered the guidance they felt was necessary for mothers to navigate the process of acculturation to Hungarian culture. This special variation on the genre of traditional prayer books, specifically those that were formerly published for women, sheds light on what leading Jewish intellectuals in contemporary Hungary thought about motherhood, its place in society, and

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how as an institution it could solve the crisis allegedly brought on by the emancipation of Jews in eastern Europe. Neologs idealized motherhood and considered the mother as the most powerful weapon against the social forces that threatened traditional Jewish observance during their time. They turned her into the guardian of the Jewish faith, trusting her with the mission of ensuring that secular tendencies did not wipe out Jewish tradition altogether (Lässig 2006: 51–2). They wished to build up moral and religiously committed families on the basis of her special, indeed extraordinary, emotional receptiveness and instinctual emotional richness.

The prayer books and prayer texts that I have presented here offer a significant self-critique of what was occurring in Hungarian Jewish culture at large. The anxiety and the struggle to identify with modernity while maintaining one's Jewish identity is palpable. These prayer books had large print runs and appear to have been popular. Arnold Kiss's *Mirjam*, for example, was reprinted year after year, 104 times between 1898 and 1948 and three times in German in the years 1907, 1923, and 1929; *Fohász* was reprinted eight times; and *Deborah* was published ten times. Yet it is hard to ascertain whether, despite having access to prayers in Hungarian and German, women followed the path that was laid out for them. It is impossible to assess how effective prayer books were in prompting mothers to assume the responsibilities they charted, even if they bought them and read them.

As challenges to traditional Judaism arose, Neologs relied on the ideal of the mother and the family, as if to hold women back from taking on the leadership positions their husbands assumed outside the Jewish community. Idealizing the mother in the context of Jewish prayer generated a sense of social order, rooted in a firm and age-old conception of gender roles, which set itself against the changes which swept through Hungarian society. Neologs created and included distinct prayers for women that connected them to their responsibilities as mothers, including pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. No doubt, they used the figure of the mother to critique the very changes they in fact desired, offering us a more accurate picture of what was at stake as Jews grappled with the challenges of modernity.

Notes

1 Following the Congress, Hungarian Jewry split into three culturally and institutionally separate factions: Orthodox (traditionalists), Neologs (progressives), and Status Quo Ante (who stood for 'unchangingness'). Their statutes were officially recognized by the Hungarian state (Ferziger 2005: 1–5; Katz 1999: 58–68, 185–200; Konrád 2009: 167–70). The most important element in understanding the history and the self-definition of Neolog Jewry was magyarization. This was the sociopolitical acculturation of non-nationals to Hungarian culture (i.e. Hungarianization), either voluntarily or through the pressure of coercive policies that resulted in full identification with the Hungarian nation (Zima

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2008: 244). There is no precise information available on the number of members of these three movements. However, it is obvious, from incomplete statistical sources, that they were more or less separated geographically: Orthodoxy dominated in Upper Hungary (historically, Felvidék) and Transylvania; Neology or Neolog Judaism, as it came to be called, was popular in the central, western, and southern parts of the country; while the Status Quo Ante communities were scattered as opposed to being concentrated regionally. Their relative figures in 1900 were: Orthodox communities, 433,663 (52.2%); Neolog communities, 356,948 (43%); Status Quo Ante communities, 39,379 (4.7%) (Frojimovics 2008: 81–4).

It is clear that the Orthodox represented a majority in all respects in 19th-century Hungary. At the same time, there was a marked increase in the number of Jews adhering to Neology. This continued increase in the size of Neolog communities was due to the intensive internal migration of Jews to urban areas: Budapest, where Neology dominated, acted as a magnet, drawing people away from other Jewish communities.

2 To elucidate the background of Neolog authors who wrote prayer books it may be noted that: Dániel Pillitz was a 19th-century Hungarian rabbi and teacher, the director of the Jewish High School in Szeged (Újvári 1929: 710); Fanny Neuda (born Schmiedl, in Moravia; 1819–1894) came from a rabbinic family. Both her father and her brother were rabbis, and she married Abraham Neuda, a religiously liberal and highly educated man from Nikolsburg/Mikulov, in the present-day Czech Republic (Herlitz and Kirschner 1927–39: i: 463; Kratz-Ritter 1993: 295); Simon Hevesi (1868–1943) and Ferenc Hevesi (1898–1952), were father and son. Simon was perhaps the greatest orator among Hungarian rabbis. His son Ferenc became the chief rabbi of Budapest (Schőner 2008); Arnold Kiss (1869–1940) was a famous rabbi in the Buda section of the capital, well known for his remarkable oratory and poetic skills, his literary translations, and public work (Újvári 1929: 483); Immánuel Lőw (1854–1944) was the chief rabbi of Szeged, a master of oratory in Hungarian (Újvári 1929: 548); and Mór Stern (1883–1944) was a journalist and lawyer in Szatmárnémeti, Satu Mare, present-day Romania (Dávid 2010: i: 206–7); Gábor Weisz was a 19th-century rabbi and religious educator in Pécs (Szinnyei 1914: xiv. 1482).

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